

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

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INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

SUBJECT: Briefing of March 22, 1971

PRESENT: Henry A. Kissinger  
Lt General Zais  
Brig. General Haig  
Lt Colonel Martin (briefer)  
David R. Young (Notetaker)

LAOS

Kissinger: It looks like they are at least successful at retrograde movements.

Martin: Well, they have done it in an orderly way. One good bit of news we have is that since Saturday noon, there have been about 1500 enemy KIA.

Kissinger: Do you really believe that?

Martin: Well, the weapons count is three bodies to every one weapon found, and usually that is a good ratio. So, the enemy KIA may be as high as 1500.

Zais: Another reason why it may be that high is that we are having very good close-in air support and the gunships are moving in on them as they are trying to hit the ARVN pulling out. They are definitely taking very heavy losses.

Haig: One of the things which we have found out is that the enemy is getting their men hopped up on booze -- a kind of a rice wine. We even found it in their canteens. They have got them so hopped up that they are suicidal.

Kissinger: That ought to make a great battle -- one army hopped up on drugs and the other army hopped up on booze. Seriously, when do you think they will all be out? You know, the President is going on TV tonight and he has to have some answer on this.

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Zais: We just don't know.

Kissinger: Could it be the end of this week?

Zais: Yes, it could be by the end of this week. The whole 1st Division is back now.

Kissinger: That's General Lam?

Zais: Yes.

Kissinger: Why do you think they are coming back now?

Zais: Well, I think it is a combination of a number of internal political-type reasons and some intrigue within the armed forces. I am sure that General Lam is furious at General Khan's remarks. Khan simply sat on the sidelines taking shots at Lam. To needle him, Khan even sent through a message denying a rumor that he was going to take over for Lam. There are definitely some hard feelings now between Lam and Khan. The fact that the marines are the ones that are staying in is a logical point. They are in a better position to stay in. They went into the least concentrated area and they have received the least pressure. And only 2 of the 3 marine brigades have been committed.

Kissinger: What about the airborne units?

Zais: They are really part of the armored task force along Route 9 and as such they can't be pulled out by themselves.

Kissinger: What then should I say to the President?

Zais: I really don't know.

Kissinger: Haig, what do you think I should say?

Haig: I think the President should know that they may be out within a week or 10 days but he should not say anything. He shouldn't let the enemy know to what degree we are anticipating a quick withdrawal.

Kissinger: How much more does the enemy have left?

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Zais: Well, the enemy is building up and I would think that it is very likely they will attack from north of Route 9. The battle is not going to be over just when we cross the Laotian border and get back into Vietnam. I would say that the situation is much as Abrams has told us and that our actions - the ARVN actions - will be in response to or related to the pressure that is put on them.

Kissinger: But if we have knocked out 6 of the 10 enemy regiments, how can they attack us with only 4? Will they attack with 4?

Zais: Yes, they could and it is somewhat misleading to say "knocked out". That cannot be taken literally. There is still some effectiveness left in those 6 regiments and they may be combined or cannibalized into another unit.

Kissinger: That means we are going to have a fairly rough April.

Zais: Yes. At least during the early stages. I think also that the NVA has been reading our press and that they to some degree are smelling victory and trying to capitalize and push on that. They are very hopped up. They have high morale right now and even though they are losing heavily and the troops find that their buddies are dying all around them they feel that they are on the path to a glorious victory.

Martin then showed Kissinger on the map the programmed B-52 strikes today. He also indicated one area in which a strike went in yesterday and according to an early report over a thousand bodies were found.

Kissinger to Zais: What in your own personal opinion went wrong?

Zais: That in part is a leading question because I don't really think that much went wrong. There are a number of factors in assessing the results - some good and some bad. For one, I think that when Abrams requested that the 2nd ARVN Division be brought in, it should have come in; that was a crucial point. If it had been followed, I think that they could have stayed much longer and the whole operation would have turned the other way.

But Thieu faces some very serious political problems and I have a feeling that in part there was some hysteria back in Saigon. The further away you get from the battle, the more rumors you have. I think that in Saigon they had a sense of extremely heavy casualties and a feeling that the relationship between Kahn and Lam was going sour.

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On top of this Thieu is worrying about his reelection. The result was that he got a little bit edgy. It definitely was a presidential decision not to commit that second division. His thinking apparently was simply that we have done them some damage; the casualties are getting a bit too high; we will live to fight another day.

Ky's stepping out also presents a problem. Thieu has got to protect his flanks against Ky. You are right in that they came out sooner than we had expected. That in itself, however, doesn't mean a defeat. There has been substantial disruption but it has not been the crucial blow we had hoped for. Abrams has an unusual instinct for the jugular and if his advice had been followed, we could have come out differently.

Haig: Abe tried to get them to commit the second division on three different occasions. He tried first a week or so ago and then again on Tuesday and Wednesday. Thieu just would not do it.

Kissinger to Zais: Do you think Lam is any good?

Zais: Yes, he is both a political and a military leader. He is more of a combination than Tri and some of the other generals have been. They are more military only. He is sensitive and he has coped with the uprisings of the students, the Buddhists, and the veterans very well.

(Kissinger: Then the only trouble he has had is with the NVA!)

Zais: But his problem is that he doesn't have the instinct for the jugular which Abrams has.

Kissinger: Do you expect the NVA to launch a major offensive now?

Zais: Yes.

Martin: But we are bringing in U.S. tank reinforcements.

Zais: Yes, the 1st of the first is being relieved by the 1st of the 77th.

Kissinger: What do the sensors read today?

Martin: 92-C has some additional, but otherwise they are minimal.

914-B	914-C	99	9-D	92-C	922
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CAMBODIA

Martin: They moved in the Chup Plantation and discovered 300 and some bodies. 180 were in fresh graves and 187 were still lying on the ground as the result of an Arc Light drop on top of the 95th G 25 additional were killed in a contact.

Kissinger: Do you really believe that they found that many?

Zais: Well, they are certainly less likely to exaggerate body claims when they are the result of air strikes.

Kissinger: How about the Snoul area?

Martin: They are still sitting there.

Kissinger: Who was it that Abe wanted to relieve?

Haig: It is this new commander.

Kissinger: Why have they broken contact again in the Chup? Were they just not being aggressive enough?

Haig: Tri ran his task forces himself. Minh has given the authority here to the division commanders and as a result they are being more cautious. They had a good fight going there on about 3 or 4 March but broke off contact. I can tell you that Abrams was extremely upset and told Thieu about it.

Martin: One good sign that we have now is that the enemy has brought its artillery back over north of the Chup Plantation.

Haig: We also have a number of reports saying that the enemy is running short of supplies in the Chup.

Zais: He has to. I don't see where else he can get his supplies in.

Haig: Snoul definitely has a disaster in the making and Abrams has accordingly told Thieu.

Kissinger to Zais: What do you think is the effect on the morale of the ARVN troops coming out of the Lam Son Operation?

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Zais: I do not think it can be described in one general assessment. It is not all bad and it is not all good. One underlying fact is that they are not fighting in Hue - they are in a foreign country, the morale of the different units will depend on what action they have been in. War is a kaleidoscope. Some will come back exuberant having really whipped the enemy where they were. Others will come back semi-panicked. The regimental commanders in the first ARVN are very good. Col Chong is a soldier-scholar, a very tough man in combat. Col Bui Dhiem - they call him the one-meter colonel he is so short - is intelligent, hard-nosed and I think a very good commander. I don't think that they are demoralized. They are going to be very tough when they fight again. For one thing they are now back into Vietnam where they have their own dependents nearby. They were also in the top ten of all the provinces in pacification. They are the ones just over the DMZ who will have to block any advance by the NVA up there.

Haig: Even in the unit that had only 80 some men left, when they were taken out they had their weapons and they brought back their dead and wounded.

Zais: They really did very well.

#### NORTH VIETNAM

Martin then went over with Kissinger the points on the map where the bombing runs took place yesterday on North Vietnam. 72 sorties were run. The Navy could not get in at all. He also noted those that were programmed for today.

Zais then showed Kissinger photos on the weather reconnaissance.

Kissinger: Yesterday was then very good.

Zais: Yes it was.

Kissinger: But this sort of operation really doesn't do much damage.

Zais: It doesn't win the war but it certainly helps.

Kissinger: Where will the A-6's go in?

Zais: I asked about that before coming over, but at that time they could not tell me for sure. He then pointed to the place on the map where the 24 F-4s went in yesterday or will be going in again today.

[END OF BRIEFING]